

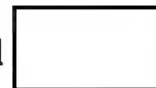


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# Israel: The Succession to Prime Minister Begin



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**An Intelligence Assessment**

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NESA 82-10100  
March 1982

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# **Israel: The Succession to Prime Minister Begin**



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## **An Intelligence Assessment**

*Information available as of 18 March 1982  
has been used in the preparation of this report.*

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This paper was prepared by [redacted] Office of  
Near East-South Asia Analysis. Comments and queries  
are welcome and may be addressed to the Chief,  
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This paper has been coordinated with the Offices of  
Global Issues and Current Operations, the  
Directorate of Operations, and the National Intelligence  
Officer for Near East and South Asia, [redacted]

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March 1982*

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**Israel:  
The Succession to  
Prime Minister Begin**

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**Key Judgments**

Israel's political system is complex. Politics is a national passion, and, although political alliances have been relatively durable in the past, they could prove less stable in the post-Begin era. The need to choose a new prime minister could be a catalytic event with a wide range of possible outcomes and consequences for Israel, its allies, and its enemies.

In the event of Prime Minister Begin's death or permanent incapacitation, Defense Minister Sharon would have an early edge among the contenders to succeed to the premiership. But Sharon could face stiff competition from older Begin proteges in Begin's Herut Party—particularly Foreign Minister Shamir and to a lesser extent, Economic Coordination Minister Meridor. Second Deputy Prime Minister and Housing Minister Levi would be another challenger because of his Sephardi background and popularity among the large community of Sephardi Jews of Middle Eastern origin—Herut's principal voter bloc. Herut kingmakers might turn to Shamir or Meridor if a leadership struggle between Sharon and his challengers threatened the stability of the Likud bloc dominated by Herut.

The desire to remain in power probably would be sufficient to hold the Likud bloc and the religious parties in Begin's ruling coalition together initially. No other Likud leader, however, would be able in the short term to reestablish Begin's unique command of Likud's fractious elements. The new bloc chief would be confronted with leadership challenges and serious internal problems that could lead to the collapse of the government coalition, an early election, and ultimately a realignment of Israel's political parties and alliances.

No Herut successor would be likely in the near term to moderate significantly Begin's tough-minded strategy toward the West Bank and other Arab-Israeli issues. The tactics and operating styles of the various contenders, however, would vary. Sharon would be inclined to take the kinds of swift, surprise moves characteristic of Begin. Shamir, Meridor, and Levi would favor a less provocative approach and increased efforts to strengthen Israel's flagging international support.

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Should Begin's Herut successor fail to reconstitute a majority coalition, opposition Labor Party Chairman Peres would try to form a government with Israel's major religious parties and small moderate Knesset groups. Such a combination would make a weak and unstable government in jeopardy of early collapse, which would force a new election. A Labor-led government, nevertheless, would try to generate progress in the peace negotiations by pushing its plan for partition of the West Bank and Gaza Strip with Jordan.



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**Begin's Health and the  
Mechanics of Succession**

The health of the 68-year-old Begin is fragile. He suffered a major heart attack in March 1977, a minor stroke in the summer of 1979, and another significant but relatively mild heart attack in June 1980. He is now recuperating from a hip fracture suffered on 26 November.

Complaining of weakness, Begin cut short his attendance at a dinner on 4 March for visiting French President Mitterrand. Begin's doctor subsequently told reporters that the Prime Minister was suffering from "accumulated tiredness caused by the pressure of events during the past few days"—including the hospitalization of his wife for chronic asthma, resistance to Israel's final withdrawal from the Sinai by militant Jewish settlers at Yamit, Egyptian President Mubarak's refusal to visit Jerusalem, and continuing tensions in Lebanon.



Israeli law is fairly straightforward on succession following the death of a prime minister, a situation that has arisen only once—in early 1969 when Golda Meir succeeded Levi Eshkol. Israel's Basic Law stipulates that if the Prime Minister dies, his government is

deemed to have resigned on the day of his death. The President then designates an interim prime minister; in all probability President Yitzhak Navon would appoint First Deputy Prime Minister Simcha Ehrlich, leader of Likud's Liberal Party and a close Begin associate. Ehrlich and the current cabinet would continue as caretakers until a successor was chosen and installed after gaining a parliamentary vote of confidence.

Navon would probably first ask the new head of the Likud bloc—as the group controlling the largest number of seats in parliament—to try to form a new government. Before this could be done, Herut, as the largest group within the Likud bloc, would have to choose a successor to Begin as party leader. After formal endorsement by the Likud caucus, he would then attempt to put together a new coalition.

The new Likud leader would have 21 days to form a new government. He would negotiate with the factions and parties that made up Begin's coalition and other Knesset groups, such as the late Moshe Dayan's TELEM Party and the ultrarightwing Tehiya Party. Should difficulties arise, the period could be extended for another 21 days. If Likud could not form a government after the second extension, Navon probably would ask Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres to try.

The new Prime Minister could then serve the remainder of Begin's term, which runs until the autumn of 1985. A new election is not required.

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Israeli law does not stipulate a procedure to determine when a sitting Prime Minister becomes permanently incapacitated—a contingency that has never arisen in Israel's history. In the event of illness requiring Begin's extended hospitalization, coalition leaders

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**Table 1****Major Knesset Factions**

Party	Leader	Knesset Seats
<b>Government Coalition</b>		
Likud Bloc	Menachem Begin	
Herut (Freedom)	Menachem Begin	25
Liberal	Simcha Ehrlich	18
La'am	Eliezer Shostak	4
State List	Yitzhak Peretz	1
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>48</b>
National Religious Party	Yosef Burg	6
Agudat Israel	Avraham Shapira	4
TAMI (Jewish Revival Movement)	Aharon Abu-Hatzeira	3
<b>Total</b>		<b>61</b>
<b>Opposition</b>		
Labor Alignment	Shimon Peres	
Labor	Shimon Peres	41
Mapam	Victor Shemtov	6
<b>Subtotal</b>		<b>47</b>
Citizens Rights Movement (allied with Labor in Knesset)	Shulamit Aloni	1
TELEM	Mordechai Ben-Porat	2
Shinui (Change)	Amnon Rubinstein	2
Tehiya (Rebirth)	Yuval Ne'eman	3
RAKAH (Democratic Front for Peace and Equality—Communist)	Meir Wilner	4
<b>Total</b>		<b>59</b>

probably would allow him considerable latitude to decide the issue, as they have in the past. Begin is a tenacious defender of his official prerogatives and probably would name an acting prime minister—an action he has often taken during past illnesses—if he had any hope of eventually returning. The cabinet probably would take collegial action to resolve the matter only if Begin clearly demonstrated incompetence or his doctors ruled that he was unfit to continue.

**The Contenders****Sharon**

Ariel ("Arik") Sharon, 53, has enjoyed an illustrious military and political career. He established the famous commando Unit 101 in the early 1950s and for years personally led it on repeated missions against Palestinian terrorists and other targets behind Arab lines. In the mid-1960s he served as chief of staff of Israel's northern command. As head of the southern

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Ariel Sharon

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command in the late 1960s and early 1970s, he ruthlessly suppressed Palestinian terrorist activity in the Gaza Strip. He led Israel's daring counteroffensive across the Suez Canal in the Arab-Israeli war in October 1973 and shortly thereafter retired from active military duty.

Sharon played an instrumental role in organizing the Likud bloc just before the national election of December 1973. He established and led a new party, called Shlom Zion, in the 1977 election, but shortly after the election (in which his party won two seats) he merged with Begin's Herut Party in the Likud bloc and served as Agriculture Minister in Begin's first government from 1977 to 1981. Sharon played a major role in Likud's reelection campaign in 1981, organizing subsidized tours of West Bank settlements in an effort to rally voter support for Likud's aggressive Jewish settlements policy. He was appointed Defense Minister after the election.

Sharon has the inside track to succeed Begin. His position as Defense Minister is the second most powerful cabinet post. Since his cabinet appointment last summer, Sharon has moved aggressively to involve himself in policymaking on all major external issues—Lebanon, the autonomy talks, normalization of relations with Egypt, and the strategic dialogue with the United States—apparently with Begin's blessing.

Sharon is a native-born Israeli (Sabra) of Ashkenazi<sup>1</sup> origin whose wide-ranging military experience and hard-charging leadership style appeal to the hawkish Sephardi community.<sup>2</sup> Polls currently rank him equal in popularity to Begin. Sharon's voter support—particularly among Sephardim—has continued to grow as he has expanded his role on key security issues. Sharon's aggressive West Bank settlements policy also has buttressed his reputation among Israeli rightwing nationalist groups.

Sharon's aggressive nature, however, generates strong opposition among many senior politicians in Herut. His surprise announcement of plans to reorganize the Defense Ministry and his recent absences from cabinet meetings have strengthened widespread perceptions that he is overly authoritarian and secretive. Sharon's enemies could threaten his efforts after Begin's passing to gain Herut's endorsement as party leader. Foreign Minister Yitzhak Shamir and Economic Coordination Minister Yaacov Meridor are the leading challengers. Begin has quietly promoted both men as potential successors in recent years.

#### Shamir, Meridor, and Levi

##### Shamir

Yitzhak Shamir, 67, was a member of the dissident Irgun underground before leaving it in 1940 to become the operational commander of the more radical Stern Gang. After Israel's independence he pursued private business ventures and served in the upper ranks of the external intelligence service from 1955 to 1965. He joined Herut in 1969, served as Knesset speaker in the late 1970s, and was appointed Foreign Minister by Begin in March 1980. Shamir has competently managed the Foreign Ministry, and his popularity has steadily grown since the last election—he

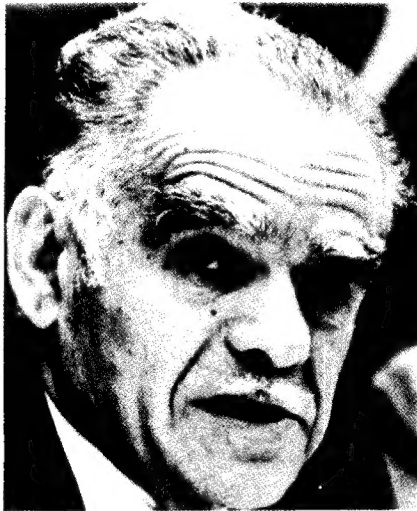
<sup>1</sup> In the narrowest sense, the term Ashkenazi applies to Jews of Central and East European origin. As used in this paper, it also includes all non-Sephardi Jews who have immigrated from North and South America, South Africa, and Western Europe.

<sup>2</sup> The term Sephardi applies in the strictest sense to Jews of Spanish and Portuguese origin. As used in this paper, Sephardi also includes "Oriental" Jews from North Africa and the Middle East.

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*Yitzhak Shamir*



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*Yaacov Meridor*

now ranks as the third most popular minister, behind Sharon and Begin. Begin attaches a high degree of confidence to Shamir's judgment and, along with Ehrlich and Sharon, relies heavily on Shamir for counsel on sensitive national security issues.

#### **Meridor**

Yaacov Meridor, 68, was, like Begin, active in the rightwing Betar youth movement in Poland in the 1920s and led the Irgun in the early 1940s before becoming second in command under Begin, with whom he continued to work closely. He served as Begin's aide in Herut and in the Knesset after Israel's independence until he retired in the late 1960s to go into private business. At Begin's request he accepted the third-highest Herut position on Likud's list for the election last June. By assuring his election to parliament—a requirement for the prime ministership—Begin probably sought to put another trusted old-guard figure in position either to compete for the job or to play a leading role in deciding who will succeed to it.

Meridor occupies a newly created and relatively powerless cabinet position and has played no visible role in decisionmaking on security matters. Herut leaders probably would not give him serious consideration unless Begin actively promoted his candidacy or Shamir stumbled. Meridor's image and position in

Herut also have suffered as a result of recent reports that he has associated with an Israeli entrepreneur possessing a criminal record.

#### **Levi**

Second Deputy Prime Minister and Housing Minister David Levi, 43, immigrated to Israel from Morocco in 1957. He is the leading Sephardi in the cabinet and the leading challenger to Sharon from Herut's second generation of leaders. Levi's popularity among the Sephardi community—which constitutes over half of Israel's Jewish population and nearly half of the electorate—makes Levi a serious challenger for Begin's role under any circumstances.

Begin and other Ashkenazi leaders of Herut have consciously promoted Levi in an effort to capitalize on his ethnic origin. Levi, in turn, has exercised his leverage to establish a direct relationship with Begin and alliances with rising Herut figures.

Nevertheless, Levi's competency for national leadership is widely doubted. His cabinet experience has been concentrated in minor domestic portfolios. He has no direct involvement in foreign and security affairs, and Begin's recent decision to exclude him from the ministerial defense committee—an inner cabinet that deals with key security issues—will further minimize his participation in foreign affairs. His

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David Levi



Camera Press ©

Yoram Aridor

housing portfolio, moreover, could expose him to Sephardi discontent if he fails to produce effective government action on Sephardi economic grievances, particularly demands for urban renewal and affordable new housing.

#### Darkhorse Candidates

Finance Minister Yoram Aridor, 47, and Ambassador to the United States Moshe Arens, 56, are the leading darkhorses should Herut be unable to choose among the major contenders. Like the others, both are hardliners on negotiations with the Arabs and are committed to retention of the West Bank.

Despite likely support from some younger Herut figures, former Defense Minister Ezer Weizman, 57, probably would face concerted opposition from senior party leaders. Over the longer haul, Weizman might consider an offer from Labor.

#### Aridor

Despite his relative youth, Yoram Aridor in recent years has shown promise as a potential leader in Begin's Herut Party. Before assuming his current post, Aridor served as a Deputy Minister in Begin's office in charge of interministerial coordination. He

also has proved adept at mediating sensitive policy and personnel disputes within Herut and at trading on his close relationship with Begin to establish alliances with key party figures.

Aridor won widespread respect within Likud during the election campaign last year because his cuts in consumer purchase taxes and increases in subsidies helped spur Likud's dramatic turnaround in the pre-election public opinion polls and contributed to Begin's reelection.

#### Arens

Moshe Arens, a US-educated engineer and newly named Ambassador to the United States, has been chairman of the prestigious Knesset foreign affairs and security committee and is an articulate defender of hardline government policies. He does not command a large following within Herut, however, and his unemotional intellectualism has failed to generate much enthusiasm among the voters.

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Jerusalem Post

Moshe Arens



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Ezer Weizman

#### Weizman

Ezer Weizman still has supporters within Herut despite his ouster by the party secretariat in November 1980. Weizman reportedly retains his popularity among some younger party members, particularly in the Tel Aviv area.

His perceived disloyalty to Begin and impatience with party discipline, however, have made him many enemies. He would have a most difficult time overcoming the opposition of party kingmakers suspicious of Weizman's unpredictability and relative flexibility on major peace negotiation issues. Weizman, however, might in the longer term consider joining forces with Labor if he is frozen out of Likud's leadership in the post-Begin era.

#### Likud's Future

Any new head of Likud probably would quickly renew the cabinet appointments and commitments Begin made to form the current ruling coalition. The coalition partners would bargain for increased advantages but probably would settle for essentially the same terms. The new leader also probably would resume Begin's abortive efforts to gain the participation of the late Moshe Dayan's TELEM Party and the ultra-rightwing Tehiya group. The successor government

thus probably would retain a pronounced nationalist and religious character.

Begin's suppression of all challengers during the past generation, however, has fostered a massive dependence on his personal leadership. The advantages of incumbency probably would be a sufficient incentive in the short term for the parties in Likud to paper over their differences. But Begin's death or retirement would threaten sooner rather than later to unleash serious disputes over policy and influence that eventually could bring about Likud's collapse.

No matter who succeeds Begin within Herut, a long-term leadership struggle almost certainly will develop contributing to tensions within the ruling coalition and making it more difficult to reach controversial decisions, particularly on key domestic economic and social issues. Sharon's selection probably would force the issue and lead to a relatively early battle among Sharon, Levi, Aridor, and other Herut figures. The Sharon-Levi struggle would remain a central element of Likud politics even if Shamir or another compromise candidate emerged, much as the sustained rivalry between Dayan and Yigal Allon burdened Labor-led governments for years after Ben Gurion's retirement in the late 1960s.

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Table 2

## Comparison of the Contenders

Contenders	Age/Place of Birth	Trade/Education	Military/Security Experience	Political/Cabinet Experience
Ariel Sharon	53/Sabra of Ashkenazi origin	Law degree—Tel Aviv University	Led commando Unit 101, 1950s—early 1960s; chief of staff, Northern Command, mid-1960s; chief, Southern Command, late 1960s, early 1970s; led Suez Canal counteroffensive, 1973 war.	Knesset member, 1973-present; cofounder Likud, 1973; founder, Shalom Zion Party (merged w/Herut, 1977); Agriculture Minister, 1977-81; Defense Minister, 1981-present.
Yitzhak Shamir	67/Poland	Studied law—University of Warsaw, Hebrew University	Irgun member, 1936-40; Stern Gang c-i-c, mid-1940s; MOSSAD, 1955-65; Knesset foreign affairs and security committee, mid-1970s.	Knesset member, 1973-present; Herut executive committee chairman, early 1970s; Knesset speaker, 1977-80; Foreign Minister, 1980-present.
Yaacov Meridor	68/Poland	Stone mason	Polish Betar leader, 1920s; Irgun c-i-c, 1941-43; Knesset foreign affairs and security committee.	Knesset member, 1949-69, 1981-present; Begin's Herut deputy, 1950s-1960s; Economic Coordination Minister, 1981-present.
David Levi	43/Morocco	Elementary education—construction worker	No military record.	Knesset member, 1973-present; Immigrant Absorption Minister, 1977-81; Housing Minister, 1979-present; chairman, Likud Histadrut faction, 1977-present; Second Deputy Prime Minister, 1981-present.
Yoram Aridor	47/Sabra of Ashkenazi origin	Law and economics degrees—Hebrew University	No military record.	Knesset member, 1969-present; deputy in Begin's office, late 1970s; Finance Minister, 1981-present.
Moshe Arens	56/Lithuania (lived in US, 1938-48)	Engineering degrees—MIT, Cal. Tech—former associate professor at Haifa Technion	Vice President, Israeli Aircraft Industries—helped develop Gabriel missile and Kfir fighter (1960s).	Knesset member, 1973-January 1982; chairman, Knesset Foreign Affairs and Security Committee, 1977-January 1982; Ambassador to United States, 1982-present.
Ezer Weizman	57/Haifa (nephew of Chaim Weizman, Israel's first President)	Studied at elite Reali high school in Haifa—graduated from British pilot training program in Rhodesia in 1943—studied aeronautics in Britain from 1946 to 1947	RAF pilot during World War II; headed air arm of Jewish underground organization Haganah in 1947; commander of Israeli Air Force from 1958-66; IDF deputy chief of staff, 1966-69.	Minister of Transport and Communications, 1969-70; Likud campaign manager for 1977 national election; Minister of Defense, 1977-80; Knesset member, 1977-81.

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The key short-term issue for whoever succeeds Begin as Herut leader probably will not be ideological orthodoxy on key peace issues. Herut has steadily become less willing to consider tactical compromises on sensitive Arab-Israeli issues in recent years, especially since the ouster of Weizman and the consolidation of party control by Begin and trusted hardline lieutenants—Shamir, Sharon, and Aridor among others. Begin's successor almost certainly will focus his attention on the difficult, pragmatic political task of maintaining a workable balance between factions within Herut and the other parties in Likud. He would have to devote special attention to mediating among younger, ambitious Herut leaders competing for the long-term leadership of the party, while containing predictable patronage and policy disputes between Herut's old guard and the other Likud components.

#### **If Likud Splits Up**

There is some chance that the struggle to succeed Begin could result in the breakup of Likud and the splintering of its constituent parties along ideological and perhaps ethnic lines. Sharon might attempt to reconstitute a conservative party with like-minded hardliners from Herut, the small Laam and State List parties in Likud, Tehiya, and perhaps some conservative Labor factions.

Likud's Liberals might seek an alliance similar to the Liberal partnership with Herut in 1965 or probe the possibility of reestablishing a partnership with Labor like that of the early 1950s. The Liberals, however, have long suffered from a declining electorate and have preserved a strong Knesset representation mainly because of their association with Begin. If the Liberals were forced to run alone, the odds are against their remaining a significant political body.

Levi and other Sephardi leaders might try to organize a nationwide Sephardi ethnic party. Such a party would maintain a tough foreign policy line but probably also would trumpet a commitment to reordering the government budget to facilitate housing and other social reforms long sought by the Sephardi community.

Sephardi ethnic parties, however, have fared poorly in the past; TAMI's success in winning three seats in the election last June was the best performance by a Sephardi party in the last 30 years. Likud and Labor, on the other hand, won nearly 80 percent of the Knesset seats—underscoring the preference of most Israelis for the major political blocs. Given the dearth of prominent Sephardim with the requisite leadership credentials—especially in foreign and security affairs—a Sephardi party would seem unlikely to constitute a serious near-term challenge to the established parties.

#### **Labor Party Prospects**

##### **If Begin's Successor Fails**

Should Begin's successor as chief of Herut prove unable to reconstitute a coalition, President Navon probably would give Labor Party Chairman Shimon Peres a chance to form a government. Peres would face a difficult task in finding a workable parliamentary majority that did not depend for its survival on the RAKAH Communist Party. He would have to persuade several small moderate or left-of-center groups—the Citizens' Rights Movement, Shinui, TELEM—as well as the hawkish National Religious Party and at least one of the other two major religious parties—the ultraorthodox Agudat Israel or the ethnic TAMI Party—to join his cabinet.

The NRP and the other religious groups would want to retain their current ministries and to gain firm Labor commitments to promote major religious legislation in the parliament. The NRP also would want to maintain its conservative influence on West Bank peace negotiation issues. Secular factions in Labor as well as the Mapam Party, Labor's junior Alignment partner, and the small moderate Knesset parties would find it difficult—perhaps impossible—to concede the religious parties the unprecedented prerogatives agreed to by Begin in the agreement of August 1981 which set up the current ruling coalition.

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Even if Peres succeeded, such a coalition would be pulled in many conflicting directions. An early collapse of the government—forcing a new election—would be a constant danger.

#### If Likud Remains in Office

Should a Likud-led government continue in office after Begin, Labor eventually would have to undertake major leadership and policy changes in order to become a serious contender for office. Its greatest challenge would be to generate a credible appeal in the Sephardi community.

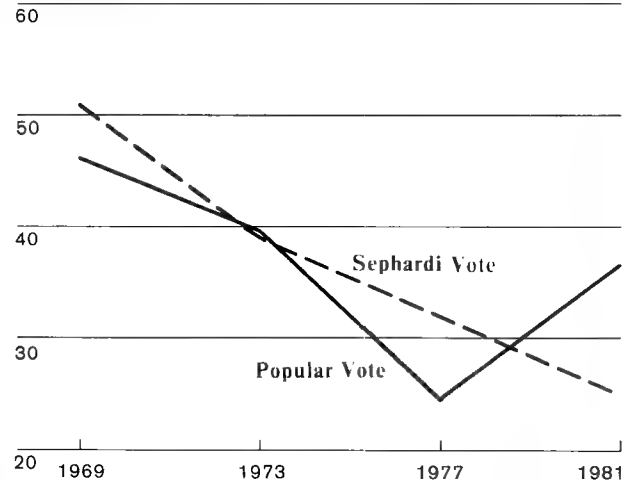
To this end, Labor would have to replace much of its predominantly Ashkenazi leadership with a more ethnically balanced group, including a greater percentage of prominent Sephardim. This, however, would further limit Labor's flexibility in negotiating a West Bank-Gaza agreement or a treaty with Syria, given the Sephardim's hawkish foreign policy views. The relentless rivalry between Peres and former Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin has stymied effective party leadership for years and encouraged a further unraveling of party unity.

Some in Labor have begun to give serious consideration to President Navon as the party's future chairman. Navon is a popular and ambitious fifth-generation Israeli of Moroccan ancestry, and his term expires in May 1983. Some also hope that Secretary General Yeruham Meshel of the Labor-dominated Histadrut trade union federation will yield to his deputy, Israel Keisar, a prominent Sephardi of Yemeni origin.

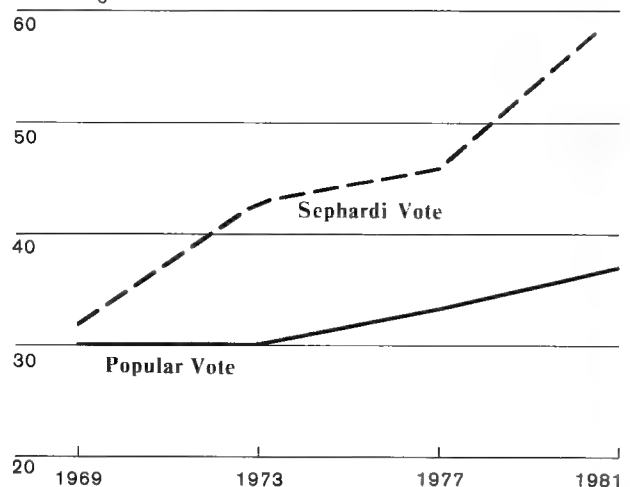
Some Labor leaders might also be receptive to making overtures to Ezer Weizman as party leader. Peres in particular has maintained a friendly private relationship with Weizman over the years. Many in the party are sympathetic to Weizman as a strong, forthright leadership figure. They would hope that he could take advantage of his "outsider" status to circumvent Labor's deep-seated factional infighting and thereby restore greater party unity and purpose. Weizman's position on most key Arab-Israeli issues is closer to Labor than Likud. Weizman probably is willing to

#### Voting Trends in Knesset Elections, 1969-81

**Labor Performance**  
Percentage of Total Vote



**Likud<sup>a</sup> Performance**  
Percentage of Total Vote



<sup>a</sup>Titles include parties that were at one time independent, but eventually coalesced into the current Likud bloc.

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consider territorial concessions in the West Bank and Gaza as long as adequate arrangements are made to safeguard Israel's security interests.

Far-reaching leadership and policy changes would be certain to provoke bitter and protracted infighting. Much of the party's Ashkenazi leadership would want to ensure that it continues to dominate Labor's bureaucracy and patronage system. Many also would resist pressure for a more conservative foreign policy strategy.

Labor ultimately might prove unable to contain its centrifugal forces and split along ideological lines. Party hawks, who represent influential elements in all three historic party factions—Mapai, Achdut Ha'avoda, and Rafi—could bolt to Likud or its successor group. Others from the same Labor groups might try to organize a dovishly inclined party with Mapam and the various centrist groups in parliament. Such a combination also would try to reorient its domestic strategy around Labor's original ideological commitment to socialist Zionism—especially a socialist-oriented economy and collectivist settlements like the kibbutzim. Sephardi figures might try to form a new ethnic party.

### **National Unity Government**

Another possibility would be for Labor to agree to join a Likud-led coalition in a national unity government. Rabin and some other Labor leaders openly favor this option, and Peres held abortive talks with an NRP leader late last year.

Those who favor such a coalition argue that it is a way for Labor to strengthen its credentials as a viable alternative to Likud and to influence Israeli policy. Labor undoubtedly would try to moderate Begin's aggressive West Bank settlements policy and hardline stance in the Palestinian autonomy negotiations with Egypt and to speed up the pace of normalizing relations with Cairo. It also would press for better control of Israel's triple-digit inflation and try to head off Likud's efforts to undermine the Labor-controlled Histadrut trade union federation.

The Likud leader of a national unity government would want to avoid encouraging doubts about his government's performance and would try to restrict Labor to relatively minor domestic portfolios. But he might perceive major advantages to be gained from Labor's participation, particularly in the event of an Israeli invasion of Lebanon or other major foreign policy initiatives likely to be controversial at home or abroad. In particular he would aim to demonstrate unity at home to strengthen his bargaining leverage with the United States.

A national unity government would be particularly likely in the event of a crisis severely impinging on Israel's security, such as a major deterioration in relations with the United States or an imminent Arab threat. In such conditions Likud and Labor would try to paper over their differences in order to present a united front to the United States and the international community.

### **Arab-Israeli Issues**

#### **Likud's Strategy**

All of the leading successors to Begin as Herut chief support the party's traditional commitment to preserving Israel's control of Palestine west of the Jordan River and hew to a hard line on other major peace and security issues. Each contender, moreover, would be strongly motivated to continue the main lines of Begin's foreign policy in order to avoid aggravating post-Begin factionalism. The hawkish inclinations of the Sephardi community would be a further major constraint. But each might be somewhat more tactically flexible than Begin.

Sharon as Agriculture Minister from 1977 to 1981 and since then as Defense Minister has actively defended and promoted Begin's plan for limited Palestinian self-rule in the West Bank and Gaza. He bears the principal responsibility for directing the massive acceleration of Jewish settlement activity on the West Bank during the past four years. He has strongly

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backed Begin, if not urged him on, in key military decisions—including the preemptive military strategy in Lebanon and the airstrike in June 1981 against Iraq's nuclear center.

Sharon clearly is unwilling to return to the pre-1967 borders—which he regards as inadequate for Israel's defense—or to accept an independent Palestinian state, which he anticipates would be pro-Soviet and revanchist. But unlike Begin, Sharon's attachment to the West Bank and Gaza is motivated by relatively pragmatic security concerns rather than hidebound ideological and Biblical claims. His extensive settlements program, road building, and other infrastructure activity in the West Bank and Gaza are principally designed to break up Palestinian population clusters and to provide the Israeli military with the means to respond quickly to security threats. Sharon also for years has trumpeted the idea that Jordan—rather than the West Bank and Gaza—should be seen as the Palestinians' "natural" homeland and that the Hashemite monarchy should be replaced by the Palestinians.

Sharon's views do not necessarily foreclose his considering territorial partition negotiations with Jordan. He undoubtedly does not regard this as a near-term prospect and presumably has not himself addressed the question of final borders. But Sharon may not be irrevocably committed to annexing the West Bank and Gaza in their entirety if alternative means could be worked out at some time in the future that adequately safeguarded Israel's perceived security interests. He would seek by this strategy to normalize Israel's eastern border, strengthen Israel's ties with the United States and key West European states, and undermine Syria's ability to rally Arab support for its demand that the Golan Heights be returned.

Shamir and Meridor have intimated that they might ultimately favor negotiating over the western border of a Palestinian state in Jordan, but both probably are referring only to minor border adjustments. We have no evidence that they are pushing this line, and Begin's apparent confidence in both men as possible successors suggests that he believes they would not initiate a significant departure from Begin's tough

negotiating strategy. Levi in the past tended toward the less dogmatic, pro-Weizman camp, but since Weizman's ouster he has loyally supported Begin.

The leadership tactics of the various Herut contenders on Arab-Israeli issues would vary. Sharon—like Begin—is inclined to take bold action on such matters to preempt serious domestic and international opposition. Shamir, Levi, and Meridor are more cautious and probably would try to follow a steadier course aimed at forestalling new friction in relations with the United States and Egypt and seeking improved ties with major West European states.

Whoever succeeded Begin in Herut almost certainly would insist that the Camp David accords are the only acceptable negotiating framework for addressing the Palestinian question. His government similarly would hold to Begin's interpretation that the agreements provide for only limited Palestinian self-rule, while leaving Israel in control of land and water resources, security, and Jewish settlement activity. It would be equally committed to preserving Israel's claim to sovereignty over united Jerusalem and the Knesset's decision on 14 December to annex the Golan Heights.

A new Likud government would continue to pursue an aggressive West Bank and Gaza settlements policy to entrench the Israeli presence in both territories. It also would be likely to continue the strategy set in motion by Sharon of trying to promote an alternative West Bank Palestinian leadership willing to acquiesce to the Likud government's concept of circumscribed self-rule.

The new regime would want to maintain the peace treaty with Egypt and to continue the Palestinian autonomy talks, since this would serve to minimize Egyptian leverage with Israel. To the same end, Tel Aviv would pursue accelerated normalization of bilateral ties and new trilateral commitments involving Israel, Egypt, and the United States in cooperative economic and regional security ventures and encouraging President Mubarak to preserve the "spirit" as well as the "letter" of the peace treaty.

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Should the autonomy talks go on inconclusively or break down, a confrontationist Prime Minister like Sharon might claim that Egypt's "rigidity" had rendered the autonomy process fruitless and then push an annexation bill through parliament. Sharon also would be likely to move the Prime Minister's office to East Jerusalem, whether or not an autonomy agreement was reached.

#### **Labor's Aims**

A Labor-led government probably would make a concerted effort to spur progress in peace negotiations. The Labor platform of December 1980 promises to honor the Camp David agreements on Palestinian autonomy, but only as an interim stage in peace talks designed to reach a final peace with Jordan—a peace based on a territorial compromise and in the framework of a "Jordanian-Palestinian solution."

To move the autonomy talks off dead center, Peres probably would elicit Egypt's interest in introducing autonomy initially in Gaza—which Egypt administered from 1948 to 1967—following conclusion of an overall autonomy agreement. Labor subsequently would try to enlist Jordan's participation to implement autonomy on the West Bank.

Labor's platform ultimately commits the party to seek a partition of the West Bank and Gaza with Jordan which would give Israel permanent control over the Jordan Valley, the Jewish settlements south of Bethlehem (Etzion bloc), greater Jerusalem, and the southern Gaza Strip. These areas would constitute Israeli-controlled "security zones" outside the purview of any Palestinian autonomy regime established during the transitional period foreseen in the Camp David agreements prior to resolving the final status of the West Bank and Gaza.

Labor's negotiating posture would be severely constrained by opposition to partition from the hawkish NRP and other religious parties and from influential hardliners in Labor itself. Begin's successor in the Herut Party, moreover, would be certain to rally strong public and political opposition to territorial compromise among supporters of Likud and the various radical nationalist Jewish settlement groups in the West Bank and Gaza.

Labor's 1980 platform also endorsed the principle of a territorial compromise with Syria over the Golan Heights. But influential party factions affiliated with Labor's many Golan settlements as well as Likud and other nationalist groups in parliament and much of the general public have long supported the idea of formally annexing the area and applauded the Knesset's decision to annex the Golan. According to a recent poll, 66 percent of the public believe Israel was justified in extending its law to the Golan. Labor would have a most difficult task overturning the Knesset decision and might not try.

#### **Relations With the United States**

Whatever the makeup of a post-Begin government, it would seek to maintain a close relationship with the United States as Israel's supplier of economic and military aid and major diplomatic supporter in the international arena. It would particularly press for:

- Continued high levels of US economic and military assistance.
- Expanded bilateral security cooperation.
- US help to facilitate Israeli arms sales in the Third World and to restore diplomatic ties with key black African states.
- US assistance to expand Israel's military-industrial base.

A Likud-led government probably would aim through expanded security cooperation with the United States to blunt US opposition to its hardline peace negotiation strategy and to counter US efforts to cultivate closer political and military relations with key Arab states. Begin's successor, in particular, probably would press the United States to stage joint air, naval, and ground maneuvers, to establish air and naval bases in Israel, and to pre-position in Israel US troops, aircraft, and associated military materiel for the US rapid deployment force.

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Labor, on the other hand, probably would strive less for direct military ties with the United States and more for diplomatic accommodation. Historically it has opposed a permanent US military presence in Israel, largely out of concern that this could mortgage Israel's independence on security and peace negotiation issues, and probably would continue to do so. A Labor-led government probably would make a greater tactical effort to accommodate US positions on major negotiating issues in an attempt to improve bilateral relations, restore closer ties with other key Western states, and blunt the Arabs' political leverage. By offering to negotiate a territorial compromise with Jordan, Labor leaders would hope to stimulate an upswing in US public and Congressional support. Peres also has indicated publicly that he hopes the party's negotiating strategy would enable Israel to open a dialogue with other moderate Arab states, especially Saudi Arabia.

Any successor government—whether led by Likud or Labor or a national unity coalition—would continue to take positions on key security issues certain to provoke opposition from the United States and West European and Latin American states traditionally sympathetic to Israel. Any government would continue to advise, train, and supply Israel's Lebanese Christian allies—former Lebanese Army Major Haddad in the south and Phalange militia leader Bashir Jumayyil in central Lebanon. The government would seek by this strategy to frustrate Syria's perceived aims to consolidate its control over the country and ultimately to establish a new military front against Israel, keep the Palestinians on the defensive, and preserve Haddad's enclave as a buffer against Palestinian terrorist attacks.

Any Israeli Government would be willing to resume military operations against the Palestinians if they staged new terrorist attacks across the border. A Likud-led government, however, probably would require less of a pretext and would favor more extreme military action. It might undertake a major ground operation into Lebanon and assassination attempts against the Palestine Liberation Organization's senior leadership in an effort to cripple the organization. Any government would be willing to undertake preemptive operations against an Arab military target perceived to pose a serious threat, including any Arab nuclear facility Israel believed might be able to produce nuclear weapons.



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